

As one motored along the M5 flatlands, south of Bristol, the day to day pressures began to melt away in anticipation of the forthcoming Club Run - to be organised by Tom Waterer in the Minehead area. Tom was being assisted in this task by Graham Goodman.

It had been just a few days previous that Suzuki GB in their wisdom, had decided to dispense with both of their services! I mention this only in the context that these two stalwarts put together a superb weekend for members and guests; yet they never once whinged or bemoaned the harsh blow that fate had dealt them, which is both commendable and gritty!

Meanwhile, back on the M5, it was time to reflect that, whilst it was desperately flat countryside, approaching Bridgwater, it would surely be hillier over towards Minehead. Some of us, I think, have thought the same on leaving Shrewsbury, bound for Lake Vyrnwy. And sure enough, once you left the M5 motorway it got hillier and more challenging by the minute. Our gathering was based at the Benares Hotel, somewhere in the middle of hilly downtown Minehead. Accommodation and catering were fine and, possibly more important, the liquid refreshment facility ran to an extremely flexible timetable. (He means the bar didn't shut 'till Bill Smith went to bed at 3 a.m. ED) Tom Waterer swears to this day he did not know that, without exception, all the other hotel guests were going to be either honeymoon or anniversary couples. Strange bedfellows, you'll agree..... I mean us and them were strange bedfellows, not the couples themselves!

Saturday morning came in with swathe after swathe of low cloud with the result that the first half hour or so the Club crocodile proceeded cautiously, and a little blindly, through what was undoubtedly some very spectacular country. I think we all knew the sun was up there somewhere and, sure enough, we eventually burst through the cloud base at the top of Porlock Hill. It was a superb experience to be up on the high ground, in bright sunshine, whilst all the combs and valleys far below seemed to be awash with cotton wool.

Down in the cloud filled lowlands I'd been following behind Hugh Palin, Keith Blair and Nicks Jeffery and Rogers -all tall in the saddle men. Do you know, I honestly believe that during the last 100 yards (towards the top of Porlock) all us shorter mortals still had our heads in the clouds whilst those 4 lucky devils already had their heads and shoulders out in the bright sunlight!

That ride along the A39 to our coffee stop, with a descent in to (and a climb out of) Lynmouth, was good motorcycling and was highlighted, for those of us prepared to crick necks, by the sighting of a magnificently antlered stag as we were approaching Blackmoor Gate. Either he knew who we were or he had the maturity that his looks suggested - because he gave our group just one tolerant look and continued with the more important business of sniffin' the heather! We duly descended upon Thornlands Adventure Centre whereupon the rifle buffs, within our ranks, were soon embroiled in a variety of shooting contests. I know not what types of gun or what size cartridges were involved but it all looked and sounded most professional. After a further helping of delicious digestive biscuits (which, because they were home made may or may not have contained gun powder) it was time to hand in all weapons and mount up. I didn't mention, until now, that of the many members and guests attending this weekend there was nobody present from Heron Suzuki GB management. It might have been a diplomatic absence, or they may have been working late at the office. Assuming the latter circumstance it seemed to me that if they were going to turn

up for this weekend it would now be safe so to do, once Tom and Graham had handed in their guns.

From Thornlands we rode through more good country to the Sportsman's Inn on Exmoor, for our lunch. The pace was respectable rather than leisurely and it was stimulating to see how Peter Fraser on a 250 MZ, wearing a black Barbour suit (and a high crown helmet, no less) ran rings round many of us on machines with thrice the capacity - simply by choosing better lines and braking points on the downhill swoops and through the bends. There's a fascination about watching an experienced motorcyclist riding quickly along the back roads, irrespective of what machine he is on. It is as well to remember that when we all dressed like Peter still does, sales were booming and motorcyclists enjoyed a reputation with the public at large (and all their parents) that we should covet today.

There was no shortage of "ambiance" over lunch at the Sportsman's Inn. Many of you will recall our gathering in the Salisbury/Marlborough area 12 months before, at which time our party had been dramatically thinned out as a result of trying to grapple with a cluster of Honda ATC's on a steeply cambered hillside. Now, one year later, in spite of handling a dozen or more firearms our group had come through completely unscathed!! Our grateful thanks, then, to Tom "Rambo" Waterer. Anyway, we drank a pleasant lunch after which we set off for Tarr Steps, a most scenic pack horse crossing of a fast flowing river right under the lee of Exmoor itself. The river at this point is about 40 yards across, strewn with irregular shaped boulders, most of which were submerged to a depth of at least 18 inches. As you might imagine, the riders of road motorcycles soon began to "needle" all the "poseurs" who had turned out for the Minehead Run on trail machines - such as the author of this report! In the event only Chris Warner's young son, David, had the temerity to actually cross the river, which he did with a magnificent bowwave, and without mishap. (A chip off the old block, is that young man). The Writer, who for this weekend, was perched up high upon a 750 Honda trail machine (an unashamed posing device) blatantly funk'd the challenge of this river crossing. What nobody knew is that on Easter Sunday, 1955, astride a 197 James Commando, whilst competing in the Beggars Roost Trial, he had already gone on his ear at Tarr Steps and was far too much of a current day coward to risk repeating the incident in front of so many imbibers contemporaries.

From Tarr Steps we trickled over to Dulverton for tea, at Crispins, a highly respectable and genteel establishment where we were made very welcome. I suspect we were the first motorcyclists, en masse, ever to have darkened the doors of Crispins - and I also suspect that we made an extremely favourable impression. We do, after all, behave in exemplary fashion when we are out on a Club Run! At this point Tom announced that the next fifteen miles to Wheddon Cross provided a fine opportunity for a bit of a "burn". In fact, this winding ribbon of road had been well chosen because there was a minimum of side roads adjoining, nor were there any restrictions or obstructions apart from the odd vicar pottering along in a Minor 1000 Estate. Naturally enough the more macho type of Club Run-ner eased himself to the front of the pack so that when Tom set forth from Dulverton there was a clutch-slipping gaggle of eager riders all trying to count the baffles up his silencers! Amongst those champing at the bit I spotted Norman Hyde, Nick Jeffery, Alan Blake, Bob Trigg, Peter Sheen, Lord Denbigh and various other riff-raff! 'Twas Alan Blake, mounted upon a very sticky grippy set of Avon tyres, who "won the dash" to Wheddon Cross. This was an invigorating gallop, but not nearly as suicidal as it appeared from the passenger seat of a Morris Minor!

We duly took stock and drew breath at Wheddon Cross, before tackling the

final leg over Dunkery Beacon and back down into Minehead. I was privileged to follow Peter Sheen across the moor and I must say I get quite a charge from the way Peter approaches his motorcycling. As Dee-Gee of the Industry Association its quite possible that Peter had a more harrowing job than some of the rest of us. Sensibly, he motorcycles on every free weekend, which could just be the reason how he retains his sanity! Peter's bikes are always immaculate with every decal and gizmo in exactly the right place. Coupled with smart bright riding gear it is no surprise that other road users never fail to ignore him! Unusually, however, Peter puts stereo plugs in both ears and rides off into the sunset to the strains of Beethoven's 5th or maybe James Last. What tickles me about this scenario is that although everyone else on the road can see Peter, he can't hear them! Following him back over Exmoor and in and out of the 'A' road traffic into Minehead I can only say I've never seen a motorcycle ridden so deftly, so safely, or so musically! The only tricky moment came when we passed a Park Ranger up on Dunkery - it seemed momentarily as if he wanted to stop us probably thought we were hijacking a couple of his Christmas trees; such is the impression these Honda trail machines impart to the uninitiated!!

By putting all the motorcycle trailers on the roofs of the cars that hauled them, it was eventually possible to accommodate everyone within the confines of the Benares Car Park. The popular route to our Saturday night banquet lay via a hot bath and the Bar. Is there anything more pleasant, after a day's riding in congenial company? Frankly, I doubt it.

The Saturday Dinner passed by in magnificent style - the bonhomie simply flowed and flowed. There was a delightful incident with a bunch of vicars, and their wives, on an adjoining table. The details escape me now, but driving home the following day it struck me that, yet again, we had struck a positive blow for the motorcycling movement, with a group of people who would not normally come into contact with any motorcyclists. Of course, its just the tiniest drop of sweetness in an ocean of hostility but it is far better that those vicars are rooting for us than wanting to cast us out. With that satisfying repas safely tucked away, there followed a dignified drift towards the Bar and that was followed by an even warmer drift into oblivion sometime towards 2 o'clock. It is an on-going ambition of mine to outlast (or should that be keep pace with) Bill Smith, our effervescent President who invariably puts us all to shame, socially, on these post-Dinner occasions!

Regrettably, I had to miss the Sunday morning meeting but this has already been properly chronicled through official channels. It remains just to say that Tom and Graham hosted an excellent Spring Club Run, having chosen an entirely fresh location coupled with an interesting route through very friendly countryside. I doubt that any Club Member, or his guest, left Minehead feeling unfulfilled. And one wonders in what frame of mind all those vicars left Minehead..... after what had proved, for our group, to be an enjoyable and memorable gathering.